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Chad Barbour
University of Kentucky

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Book Review

Delaney, Samuel

Times Square Red, Times Square Blue

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Samuel Delaney's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* is actually two extended essays joined together as a book. With this structure, Delaney creates two different ways of looking at his central topic: a first person, experiential account and a theoretical analysis. The central topic here can be seen from two angles: 1) a study of homosexual subculture of New York City and 2) the way people interact and connect with each other in an urban environment. Both of these angles are equally important, but for this essay I will focus on the latter aspect: what Delaney describes as "contact."

While "Times Square Blue" offers an intriguing and vivid picture of life on Forty-Second Street before the redevelopment, "Times Square Red" provides the heart of Delaney's argument. This essay centers on the concept of "contact": interclass, often random encounters between people in a public and urban space. "Contact" differs from the standard idea of "community" (usually defined by "small town" familiarity) and it differs, as well, from "networking." For Delaney, "contact" is an important aspect of city life in which people can assist each other, meet each other, and sometimes form permanent relationships from usually brief meetings. An important aspect of "contact" is its ability to cross class lines. Interclass relationships drive what Delaney sees as a healthy "democratic metropolis." In ad-

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dition, capitalism both creates and destroys spaces for contact. His example of Forty-Second Street demonstrates this fact. While porn theaters were economically viable, they offered public spaces in which marginal and interclass "contact" could take place. But, when a moral capitalism sets in — when it becomes financially beneficial to "clean up" Forty-Second Street, we then see capitalism's adverse effect upon interclass contact.

Delaney's work provides multiple aspects of entry. Two of the most prominent are the queer studies element and his discussion of human community within the city. While the former angle provides an important contribution to the study of homosexual culture, for the purposes of this essay, his second point on human community is the most valuable. The argument he sets up here is that within the city there are various possibilities for "contact" and that through such "contact" a human community is formed. This community differs, though, from the typical idea of community. Delaney targets this idea of small town, everyone-knows-your-name kind of community and positions against it his idea of "contact." For Delaney, "contact" produces a more valuable form of interaction in that it crosses boundaries of race, class, sexuality, and gender. "Contact" sustains diversity through its fluidity and mutability. Unlike the "small-town" community that stringently maintains divisions and boundaries, "contact" offers a fluidity that accommodates an ever-changing citizenship. "Contact," then, might be the ideal democracy toward which this country aims. But, as Delaney describes, "contact" becomes less and less of a possibility as moral capitalism gains ground.

On a more personal note, my understanding of Delaney's idea of "contact" developed more fully in my mind after the events of September 11. The disastrous tragedy that befell New York heightened my own sense of what "contact" means in an urban environment. Delaney's book offers a way of understanding how people were able to cross multiple social boundaries to aid and help each other in a place where, supposedly, everyone is a stranger. *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* might foster, then, a new awareness of how people interact with each other in urban environments. An awareness that values the seemingly unimportant and random encounters that, as Delaney shows, actually constitute a complex and substantial system of human interconnectedness.